

The Message of 1 Timothy

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Church's function as the proclamation of Truth in the world and the Minister's responsibility to exposition of Truth in the Church.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:15

Topics: "Function of the Church", "Responsibilities of the Minister"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the essential functions of the Church and the minister as outlined in 1 Timothy, highlighting the Church's role as the pillar and ground of truth in the world and the minister's duty to expound that truth within the Church. He warns against hindrances such as false doctrine, failure in prayer, and inadequate leadership, urging both the Church and ministers to remain steadfast in their responsibilities. The sermon underscores the importance of a consistent and godly life in both the Church and its leaders, as they work together to fulfill their divine purpose. Morgan calls for a commitment to unchanged gospel truths, unceasing worship, and a faithful ministry to effectively proclaim the message of godliness. Ultimately, he stresses that the Church's mission is to manifest the truth of Christ to the world.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Central Teaching

i. The true Function of the Church.

The Proclamation of the Truth in the World.

a. The Instrument. Church. Pillar. Ground. ii. 15, 16.

b. The Truth. The Mystery of Godliness. iii. 15, 16.

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The Exposition of Truth in the Church.

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II. The Abiding Appeal

i. To the Church.

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The Instrument fitted for the Fulfillment of Function.

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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

The Things that hinder

i. False Doctrine.

ii. Failure in Prayer.

iii. False Government.

II. To the Minister

The Things that hinder.

i. Failure in Doctrine.

ii. Failure in Duty.

iii. Failure in Diligence.

This letter is the first of three; which while separated from each other in that they were written at different times and to two persons, are yet correlated in that they deal with one subject, that of the relation between the minister and the Church. They were all written to men occupying positions of responsibility in regard to churches of. Jesus Christ; Timothy in Ephesus, and Titus in Crete.

The doctrine of the Church, and the fundamental doctrine concerning the ministry, we find in other of Paul's writings which we have already considered; and the things therein taught must be borne in mind as we come to these letters which, while so largely personal, are yet full of relative values. We find in our study of the New Testament that sometimes the Church is spoken of, sometimes the churches,

sometimes a church. That is to say, the word is used in reference to the whole Church, the complete Church. It is also used of local churches. Whereas it is perfectly true that there is one Church of God; it is equally true that there was the church at Ephesus, the church at Corinth, and so on. In that sense therefore we use the word "churches" ; not that these churches are divided each from the other ; but that the whole Church is divided by locality, by circumstances, by geographical distances, into churches. In the New Testament it is evident that every local church was a microcosm of the catholic Church, and all the great fundamental doctrines concerning the catholic Church are equally applicable to the local church. Timothy was in oversight of the church at Ephesus; Titus was fulfilling a special work in connection with the church in Crete; and these letters were written to these men, holding positions of spiritual responsibility for very definite and specific purposes, and their theme is that of the interrelation of the minister of the Word, and the Church(1).

The first part of I Timothy deals with the charge of the minister, that over which he has care, the church. The second part is the apostolic charge to the minister concerning his consequent responsibility. In these three letters then the great theme is that of the church and the minister. The first letter to Timothy is general and fundamental; the letter to Titus deals particularly with the method by which the minister is to set the church in order; and in the second letter of Timothy the particular subject is that of the minister's personal responsibility.

Having thus recognized the inter-relationships of these letters we may now turn our attention to the first

The central teaching of this first letter to Timothy is that of its revelation of the true function of the church; and the true function of the minister.

The true function of the church is the proclamation of Truth in the world. The true function of the minister is that of the exposition of Truth in the Church. The one function for which the Church exists is that of the proclamation of Truth in the world. The one function for which the ministry is created is that of the exposition of Truth within the Church. That is the exact thought underlying Paul's teaching in the Ephesian letter concerning the catholic Church. In that letter, when we turn from the discussion of the Church's predestination, edification, and vocation, to the application of the truth in detail, we find Paul writing "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" ; and in close connection declaring that when Jesus ascended and received gifts, "He gave some to be apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering" ; that is to say that the saints are to fulfill the ministry, and men qualified by gifts are to perfect the saints for the fulfillment of that ministry. The ministry of the Church is that of the proclamation of the truth of God in the world. The ministry created by gifts bestowed is that of perfecting the saints. The saints are to be perfected by the truth. The one function of the ministry then is the exposition in the Church of the truth which the Church is to proclaim to the world.

That is the central teaching of this letter in application to the local church.

The true function of the Church then is that of the declaration of the Truth to the world.

"That thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

There we reach the central light of the epistle concerning the true function of the Church. The Church is an instrument; it is "the pillar and ground of the truth" ; it is that upon which the truth is to be displayed; it is that upon which the truth is to be so raised up that men may see it. This is in perfect agreement with the teaching of our Lord.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The value of the Church in the world is that of the Truth which the Church reveals, proclaims; that Truth is light, which flashes upon the darkness, rebuking it, dissipating it, making it easy for men who are stumbling to find their way.

The apostle immediately, comprehensively, and most marvellously described the Truth in the words "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."

The word which most simply conveys the meaning of the Greek work here translated "godliness" is the old word piety. It has largely dropped out of use in recent years, and for some reasons we are not sorry, for it was very much abused. Yet that is the real thought of godliness, and if we use it, as did our fathers, to describe religion in life, relationship to God in the actualities of every-day life, we have the true thought of godliness.

Where is this piety? Where is this life of relationship to God to be seen? The answer to such inquiries is to be found in the fact that the apostle immediately passed from the abstract ideal of godliness to a concrete and positive Person in Whom the idea was perfectly revealed; "He Who was manifested in the flesh." For poetic beauty of expression Humphrey's translation of this passage in the Cambridge Bible is very fine;

"Who in flesh was manifested,
Pure in spirit was attested;
By angel's vision witnessed,
Among the nations heralded;
By faith accepted here,
Received in glory there!"

According to that setting of the passage, the three couplets suggest the central facts in the life and work of Jesus ; the first the life-story ; the second the angels desiring to look into the mystery, and the nations hearing the ministry : the third the victory among men by faith, and the ascension.

Though it is poetic and beautiful, I do not think that it reveals the deepest values of the passage.

Rotherham thus translates; -

"Who was made manifest in flesh,
Was declared righteous in spirit,

Was made visible unto messengers;

Was proclaimed among nations,

Was believed on in (the) world,

Was taken up in glory."

So far as I have any right to express an opinion, I do not hesitate to say that I consider that to be a most accurate, and beautiful translation. It covers far more than the life-story of Jesus when He was in the world, including the whole mystery of godliness manifested, beginning with the life-story, and ending with the second Advent.

The first line deals with the whole fact of the human life; "Who in flesh was manifested." The second line, "Was declared righteous in spirit," refers to the resurrection from the dead, for it was by the resurrection from the dead that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness." The third line, "Was made visible unto messengers," needs to be carefully noticed. The Greek word is sometimes translated "angels," and sometimes "messengers" ; and here I believe Rotherham is quite right in translating it messengers. The messengers were not angels in our general sense, but those who saw Him after resurrection, and who became the first apostles of the new movement. The immediate result of that manifestation to the messengers is declared in the fourth line "Was proclaimed among nations" ; and the spiritual result in the fifth " Was believed on in (the) world." These two facts of proclamation and belief are going forward now. The last line, "Was taken up in glory," refers to the Ascension of our Lord, and ultimately to that hour when, completed in His saints, His whole body perfected at the second Advent, Christ and His Church as an eternal unit pass into the heavens.

The great mystery of godliness then, according to this earliest hymn of the Church, is that of the manifestation of godliness in the flesh of the Son of Man ; the declaration of His righteousness by resurrection ; that risen One made visible to messengers, who proclaim the resurrection which is the foundation truth of Christianity ; the proclamation issuing in the belief which brings men into living union with the manifested One ; and ultimately, the complete manifestation in the Church in her union with Christ.

Thus the true function of the Church of God in the world is that of the proclamation of godliness; the Christ, and all those associated with Him, manifesting to the world the true life of piety, of religion, of godliness.

The true function of the minister then is that of the exposition of Truth in the Church. This is to be done by teaching, by exhortation, and by example.

The word is full of solemnity, one that always searches the heart of those who are called to the ministry of the Word. It is not by orthodoxy of intellectual comprehension merely that this work can be done. It is only as Truth is incarnate in the life of the teacher that the teacher has the power to prepare others to reveal the Truth. The responsibility of the Church in regard to the ministry is that it shall incarnate the Truth taught, in order that it may fulfill its function in the world as the pillar and ground of the Truth, that from which the glory and light of the Truth flashes upon the darkness of the world.

The abiding appeal to the Church is that the instrument must be fitted for the fulfillment of the function. The supreme matter of importance in the life of the Church is that she shall be an instrument able to proclaim the Truth. First her gospel must be an unchanged gospel. There must be no turning aside to false

knowledge and heresies, such as Gnosticism and others that were then creeping in ; no turning aside from the one doctrine of godliness manifested in flesh ; the great faith once delivered to the saints in the Person of Christ, and multiplied in exposition through all these who share His life. The Church must be true to her gospel.

Secondly her worship must be unceasing; hence that whole section which deals so wonderfully with the subject of prayer.

Finally she must be responsive to the authority of a faithful ministry.

In order to be an instrument fulfilling her true function the Church needs a gospel unchanged, worship unceasing, and an unfailing ministry.

The responsibility of the minister may be described in the same way. The instrument must be fitted for the fulfillment of function. That fitness on the part of the minister consists of unswerving loyalty to truth; consistent behaviour, that is behaviour towards others in harmony with the truth proclaimed; and realization of godliness in personal life; that is personal life harmonious with the truth, mastered by the truth, responsive to the truth.

There is an immediate application of this message to the Church of God, and I choose to make it, having thus seen the positive teaching, by a negative statement. Let the Church beware of the things that hinder. They are false doctrines; failure in prayer: false government False doctrine is any doctrine that denies the essential truths focussed in the apostolic statement. When the Church relaxes her hold upon any vital part of the essential truth of the New Testament, she is weakening her testimony" Failure of prayer is so patent a secret of failure that it only needs to be stated. False government is government by men who lack the godly character. Both bishops and deacons must be men of true Christian character. We have been too eager to seek men for other reasons than for the highest; and to put them in charge of the affairs of the Christian Church. Those in oversight should be men full of faith and the Holy Ghost, men whose lives are transformed by the great doctrines for which the Church stands. Oversight must be in fulfillment of the truth, by incarnation of the truth; or what hope is there that the Church will rise to the fulfillment of her function in the world?

The application to the minister is that he is warned against failure in doctrine; failure in duty; and failure in diligence. No man can be in the ministry of Jesus Christ and fulfill the ideals of this letter to Timothy without putting into the business of his ministry, the business of his study, the business of his exposition, the business of his life, all the forces of his being.

Our sources of strength are sufficient. Truth itself, if known and responded to, will make us free from all the things that hinder us in the fulfillment of our service. Let those who teach the Word of God, whether in the larger assembly, or in the smaller circle, remember that teaching is only valuable and dynamic in the measure in which it is given, not by intellectual processes merely, but by volitional obedience and the changed life that results. How often we need to remind ourselves of the word of Emerson, "I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are." Let us solemnly remember it in the presence of God. However orthodox the thing we say, however godly the method of our presentation of the truth, unless the life harmonizes, it is not only true that the things said will have no effect, it is true that the things said become a blasphemy and an impertinence.

The Church of God in the world to-day has as her function the proclamation of the truth of godliness. Those who teach the Word of God have as their responsibility that they give such exposition of the truth in teaching and life that the Church shall be equipped for her great work. May He Who has honoured us with the sacred responsibility it us for the fulfillment of the duty.

(1) A glance at our analysis of contents will show an inter-relation between these letters which is remarkable and interesting. In I Timothy, there are two divisions A and B. In 2 Timothy. the theme of B in I Timothy is elaborated in three divisions, A, B, C, which cover the same ground as 111.. II., I. of B in I Timothy. In Titus the theme of A in I Timothy is elaborated; the application is different, but the general conceptions are the same. See "The Analyzed Bible," Vol. iii., p. 248, and on.

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